

Testimony in Support of

HB 7005, AAC Domestic Violence Offender Program Standards and Increased Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence

Judiciary Committee

March 16, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Mallory Pyka and I work for Safe Futures as a Family Violence Victim Advocate, contracted in The Family Relations Division in New London and Norwich court. Safe Futures advocates serve approximately 5,000 victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Southeastern Connecticut annually. Our services include a 24 hour hotline, an emergency shelter, counseling and advocacy offices, a transitional living program, supportive housing services, court based family violence victim advocates, an advocate in a local police department and educators in local school systems.

We urge your support in House Bill 7005, Increased Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence. Since 1981 Connecticut law has allowed the names and addresses of sexual assault victims to be kept confidential throughout involvement with law enforcement and the criminal justice system (CGS 54-86d and 54-86e). This bill proposes extending that same confidentiality to victims and children of family violence crimes.

Seeking assistance for a family violence crime can be a very difficult step for a victim to take. They are often afraid about how they or their abuser will be judged. Many victims live with the belief that the abuse is their fault. We have heard from many victims that some of the hesitation to involve the police is based on the knowledge that their names and identities will likely appear in the local media.

Sometimes, an older child may battle with the decision to call the police when witnessing a domestic violence incident in the home because they have heard about or read articles in the newspaper about someone they know after a domestic violence arrest has been publicized with a victim's name and address. They have witnessed the judgement of peers and the humiliation felt by the children/victims involved. They see the exile from peer groups and family friends based upon actions out of the victim's control. Many friends and family do not understand that victims are not to blame. Victims have been traumatized and need support and understanding or at the very least, privacy.

I would like to share with you a recent article published in a local newspaper. The incident was of an assault of a boyfriend on a girlfriend. The article lists the abuser and the crime committed to include second degree assault, first degree strangulation, first degree reckless endangerment, disorderly conduct and violation of a family violence restraining order.

The article then goes on to list the victim's (girlfriend) name, age, town of residence and quote's from the statement she gave to police. Imagine the victim in the hospital the next morning reading this and feeling re-victimized. Now the victim has to deal with the emotions of fear of retaliation from her abuser once they read her statement given to the police in detail in the newspaper. Not only has the media re-victimized this person but they may have also put the victim in further danger.

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When the advocate reached out to this victim, she was afraid to talk to anyone, even though we offered her confidentiality for safety planning purposes. The likelihood of this victim reaching out to the police or court system in the future is slim. If the media was not able to obtain this information, the victim would not have been exposed to not only the media, but to coworkers, peers, elderly family members, friends and neighbors. The victim and the abuser do not even share a common name. The victim would have had the choice to decide who should or should not know about her horrific assault.

When we discussed the practice with the local media reporter, we were informed that since it is not a law, they are told to obtain the information and to print it. The information was obtained from the court clerk's file where the warrant was stored along with the protective order. Although a victim of a domestic violence crime must show identification in order to obtain a copy of a protective order from the court clerk's records and court and law enforcement personnel must use passwords to obtain information from the Protective Order Registry, there are no laws in place to safeguard a vulnerable victim of a domestic violence crime identity from the media.

We ask for your support in protecting victims and children of domestic violence crimes and allow them the same protection as victims of sexual assault.